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ABSTRACT

The implementation of New York City secondary-level transitional classes in English as a second language (ESL) is evaluated. The classes are designed to improve the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English necessary for success in mainstream classes. This evaluation, based on data gathered via site visits, interviews, and an examination of curriculum materials, focused on staffing and staff training, student selection and programming, curriculum development, and classroom implementation issues. The classes were found to be diverse in terms of teacher background, student placement and programming, and instructional focus. Based on the evaluation findings, it is recommended that wherever possible, ESL transitional students should be programmed for a corresponding credit-bearing English class and that the ESL program should encourage greater articulation between teachers of the two class types. (MSE)

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A PRELIMINARY LOOK AT ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE TRANSITIONAL CLASSES 1985-86

OEA Evaluation Report

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A PRELIMINARY LOOK AT ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE TRANSITIONAL CLASSES 1985-86

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SUMMARY

The English as a Second Language Program (E.S.L.) is funded by Chapter I and by Pupils with Special Educational Needs (P.S.E.N.). It is a basic skills program for students of limited English proficiency (LEP). Staff assign students to one of three levels of instruction: beginning (1-2), intermediate (3-4), and advanced (5-6). A few schools offer one or two additional terms to students who need more work on their English-language skills. Some students take a transitional class prior to or concurrently with a mainstream English class.

This report focuses on the implementation of these funded E.S.L. transitional classes. The objective of these classes is to improve the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English necessary for success in the mainstream. During the 1985-86 school year, 13 schools offered such funded classes. Individual schools offered from one to seven classes. Three schools offered them for the first time during the 1985-86 school year. Over 70 percent of the schools had fewer than 50 students in transitional classes. In nearly all of these schools, these classes functioned as a transition to mainstream English and students took these non-credit classes in conjunction with a paired credit-bearing English class.

The funded classes were diverse in terms of teacher background, student placement and programming, and instructional focus. Most teachers were licensed in E.S.L. or English; almost all had prior experience teaching E.S.L. Most schools required E.S.L. students to take the transitional class. Students at different schools took it when they were at different stages in the E.S.L. sequence; nearly half took transitional classes corresponding to E.S.L. 6. In some schools, students did not take a paired credit-bearing class along with their funded class. At a few schools, teachers developed E.S.L. transitional curricula which dealt with reading and with career issues. Some classes were largely indistinguishable from mainstream English classes; in others, teachers used techniques particularly appropriate for LEP students. Teachers of funded and paired classes met informally to discuss student problems and curriculum. Regardless of the particular classroom focus or approach, teachers and staff development specialists agreed that students benefited from an additional daily period of E.S.L. instruction.

Based on the evaluation findings, it is recommended that:

- Wherever possible, E.S.L. transitional students should be programmed for a paired tax-levy English class.
- The E.S.L. Program should encourage greater articulation between teachers of funded E.S.L. transitional classes and teachers of tax-levy classes.

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I. INTRODUCTION

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The English as a Second Language Program (E.S.L.) has provided services for New York City high school students for more than 15 years. Its goal is to help students of limited English proficiency (LEP)* attain communicative and linguistic competency in English by the end of the secondary school program. E.S.L. is a basic skills program which provides listening, speaking, reading, and writing instruction in the English language to students with over 30 different native languages. E.S.L. is funded by Chapter I and by Pupils with Special Educational Needs (P.S.E.N.).** The Office of Educational Assessment/ High School Evaluation Unit (O.E.A./H.S.E.U.) annually conducts an evaluation of this program based on qualitative and quantitative data.***

E.S.L. staff group students homogeneously on the basis of English proficiency. They assign each student to one of three levels of instruction: beginning (E.S.L. 1-2), intermediate (E.S.L. 3-4), and advanced (E.S.L. 5-6). A few schools offer one

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*To be classified as LEP, students had to score below the 21st percentile on the English section of the Language Assessment Battery (LAB). The LAB is a norm-referenced test used to measure the basic English skills of students whose native language is not English. Norm-referenced tests (N.R.T.s) are based on New York City norms. N.R.T. scores indicate a student's standing relative to other students in the nation.

**A school is eligible for federal Chapter I funds if a specified proportion of its student body either qualifies for the free lunch program or belongs to a family that qualifies for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (A.F.D.C.); it is eligible for New York State P.S.E.N. funds if its student body fails to meet certain academic standards.

***Previous years' reports are available from O.E.A./H.S.E.U.

or two additional terms (E.S.L. 7-8) to students who need more work on their English-language skills. Some advanced-level students also take a transitional class prior to or concurrently with a mainstream English class.

This evaluation focuses on the implementation of funded E.S.L. transitional classes. During the 1985-86 school year, 13 schools offered such classes. In nearly all of these schools, they function as a transition to mainstream English and students take these non-credit classes in conjunction with a credit-bearing English class. Most of them are the equivalent of E.S.L. 6 or E.S.L. 7/8. Most schools which offer E.S.L. transitional classes require E.S.L. students to take them. A large majority of schools which offer these classes have fewer than 50 students enrolled in them.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The E.S.L. program has identified a number of program objectives. This evaluation focused on the following objective:

- To provide an instructional program which will improve the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English necessary for success in the mainstream.

SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

This evaluation is based on data gathered about E.S.L. transitional classes. O.E.A./H/S.E.U. used a number of qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate the transitional classes in the 1985-86 Chapter I/P.S.E.N. E.S.L. Program. These

tools and techniques included site visits, interviews, and an examination of curriculum materials.

O.E.A./H.S.E.U. initially considered collecting and analyzing student achievement data. However, the diversity of student level and class focus among transitional classes made this untenable. For example, students in classes which correspond to E.S.L. 6, for the most part, took the transitional class in the course of their normal progress through the required E.S.L. sequence. Students in classes which correspond to E.S.L. 7 or 8, however, took the transitional class because their English skills were still not sufficient for them to function successfully in the mainstream. Another key variable was the diversity of focus among funded E.S.L. transitional classes. Some classes dealt primarily with reading, other functioned as writing and conversation classes, and still others offered some combination of basic language and comprehension skills.

SCOPE OF THE REPORT

The O.E.A./H.S.E.U. evaluation of the 1985-86 E.S.L. Program is presented in two reports. This report contains three chapters. Chapter I includes program background, scope of the evaluation, and evaluation procedures. Chapter II is a description of the funded E.S.L. transitional classes. Chapter III contains conclusions and recommendations. The second report summarizes student outcome data by school and by proficiency level (beginning, intermediate, advanced).

II. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Transitional E.S.L. provides students who are at or near the end of their six- to eight-term E.S.L. sequence with additional reading, writing, and speaking training. Some of these classes focus specifically on reading or writing skills. In nearly all schools where it is offered, these classes function as a transition to mainstream English. In almost every instance, students take these non-credit-bearing funded courses in conjunction with a credit-bearing English class.

During the 1985-86 school year, 25 schools offered E.S.L. transitional classes. Of these schools, nine supported these classes with Chapter I funds, 12 with tax-levy funds, and four with both Chapter I and tax-levy funds. This report focuses on the implementation of funded E.S.L. transitional classes. Individual schools offered from one to seven funded transitional classes. Sheepshead Bay High School offered funded transitional classes for the first time in fall, 1985; Erasmus and George Washington High Schools began offering these classes in spring, 1986. All but one schools did not grant credit for the funded class; George Washington High School gave its students a half-credit. The total number of students in E.S.L. transitional classes varied from school to school. Over 70 percent of them had fewer than 50 students in transitional classes. John Bowne High School had the largest concentration of students in funded

transitional classes: about 30 in each of its five classes. Erasmus High School had nearly 100 students in its five funded classes. The large E.S.L. program at John F. Kennedy High School involved 224 students in its transitional classes, but they were spread among three funded and four tax-levy classes.

STAFFING AND STAFF TRAINING

Nearly all of the 13 schools with funded E.S.L. transitional classes assigned one to three teachers to them. The exception was John F. Kennedy High School, with seven assigned teachers (three funded and four tax-levy). At eight schools, each teacher had a single transitional class; at four schools, each teacher had two or three such classes; and at one school, a teacher had five.

Interviews with 12 of the 22 funded teachers of spring, 1986 E.S.L. transitional classes indicated considerable diversity in terms of licensing. Five of those interviewed had E.S.L. licenses, an equal number had English licenses, and the remaining two were licensed in Spanish. Of those without E.S.L. licenses, five had taken graduate or undergraduate classes in E.S.L. methodology; one of these teachers was about to take the E.S.L. licensing examination. The other teachers without such formal training had prior experience teaching E.S.L. Seven of the teachers interviewed had taught E.S.L. transitional classes prior to the 1985-86 school year. Of those remaining, only a single teacher had not previously taught other E.S.L. classes. E.S.L.

teaching experience averaged five years: 1985-86 was the first year in the classroom for the least experienced and the fifteenth for the most experienced teacher.

E.S.L. staff development specialists (S.D.S.s)* limited their training efforts almost entirely to those teachers of funded transitional classes who were relatively inexperienced. S.D.S.s met with them on a regular and individual basis to discuss classroom methodology and management. They provided assistance to other teachers primarily by sharing materials.

At two schools, the S.D.S.s had played a significant role in administrators' decisions to offer E.S.L. transitional classes. The E.S.L. administrative office had provided the English Department at George Washington High School with written guidelines to assist it in setting up such classes; the S.D.S. assigned to Theodore Roosevelt High School had encouraged the creation of transitional classes. At both schools, the S.D.S.s continued to be active in reviewing and selecting material and providing general direction for these classes.

STUDENT SELECTION AND PROGRAMMING

The basis of student assignment to these classes varied among the 13 schools with funded E.S.L. transitional classes. Most required all E.S.L. students to take this class, but other schools required it only of students who needed additional work

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*S.D.S.s visit schools with funded E.S.L. classes at least twice a month to train and assist teachers, distribute curriculum materials, and collect data.

on their English-language skills. Staff made programming decisions on the basis of teacher recommendations, placement tests, interviews, or scores on the LAB.

Students took funded E.S.L. transitional classes when they were at different stages in the E.S.L. sequence. In spring, 1986, students at nearly half (46 percent) of the schools took funded transitional classes corresponding to E.S.L. 6; 15 percent took classes corresponding to E.S.L. 7; nearly a quarter (23 percent) took them corresponding to E.S.L. 7/8; and less than a tenth (eight percent) took classes corresponding to E.S.L. 5. In addition, students at Taft High School who had completed E.S.L. 6 went into an advanced/transitional class which E.S.L. 5/6 students also took; these students reviewed material which, for the most part, they covered when they had first taken E.S.L. 5/6. At John Bowne High School, some students took a third transitional class which prepared them for the Regents Examination in English which is among the Regents examinations they must pass to graduate with a Regents diploma; students eligible for this class had already passed the Regents Competency Tests (R.C.T.s) in reading and writing which are required for graduation with a general diploma.

The focus of both the non-credit E.S.L. transitional class and the credit-bearing tax-levy English class with which it was paired varied from school to school. In some schools, considerable overlap existed between the skills taught in the two classes. However, significant differences existed in other

schools. At Theodore Roosevelt High School, for instance, the transitional class covered writing and conversation, whereas the tax-levy class focused on reading and grammar. At John F. Kennedy High School, the transitional class combined reading and writing, whereas the tax-levy class was specifically a writing class.

Most students in funded E.S.L. transitional classes also took a paired, credit-bearing tax-levy class. However, not all students took such a class. At Sheepshead Bay High School, which did not have enough E.S.L. transitional students to establish a separate paired tax-levy class, these students were scattered among tax-levy classes which provided different levels of English instruction. At Erasmus High School, students did not take a paired tax-levy class along with their funded E.S.L. transitional class; E.S.L. students at all of the other levels took two classes, one a funded, non-credit class and the other a tax-levy, credit-bearing class. At Wingate High School, some students took a paired tax-levy class along with their E.S.L. transitional class, but others did not take the tax-levy class until after they had completed the transitional class.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

At a few schools with funded E.S.L. transitional classes, teachers have developed curriculum materials specifically for use in those classes. For the most part, however, teachers of these classes are using only standard textbooks and materials in general use in E.S.L. and/or English classes. The range of the

curriculum developed illustrates the diversity of approaches taken by teachers of E.S.L. transitional classes.

Theodore Roosevelt High School began offering funded E.S.L. transitional classes in the spring, 1985 term. By the end of that term, a teacher had developed a 25-page curriculum guide for its level six transitional reading course. It contains a series of preliminary lessons on reading comprehension: identifying the main idea, understanding the use of details to support the main thought, outlining paragraphs and articles, and summarizing. It also contains a lesson on using research material to write a biographical report and suggestions for oral discussions and writing practice. The guide includes short reading selections with vocabulary lists, comprehension questions, and writing suggestions.

Some high schools incorporated a career component into their funded E.S.L. transitional classes. At Theodore Roosevelt High School, for example, teachers used the reading comprehension curriculum guide in conjunction with the course's career components. Teachers infused career-focused content into many facets of the course. They also accentuated this focus in the course segments dealing with business letters, resumes, and interviews. At James Monroe High School, funded teachers also took a career-exploration approach to their E.S.L. transitional classes. Many lessons, including those designed to prepare students for the R.C.T., contained a career-furthering instructional objective and activity. In addition, students did a

research project based on a career-related interview, internship experience, visit to a career locale, or related library research.

At John F. Kennedy High School, a teacher developed a curriculum for the writing component of the tax-levy paired class. Although she did not develop the guide specifically for funded E.S.L. transitional classes, she did use it during the fall, 1985 term when she taught such a class. The curriculum includes a process approach to writing techniques which involves students in a cycle of pre-writing, drafting, revising, peer critiquing, and editing. It encourages students to begin writing without the constraints of punctuation, spelling, grammar, and sentence structure; students address these mechanics of writing only after they have gotten their ideas onto the paper. The curriculum guide includes lessons on free writing, selecting topics, keeping a journal, and writing dialogues. The John F. Kennedy E.S.L. coordinator noted that free writing, which was discussed in the curriculum guide, is a key focus of writing lessons in funded E.S.L. transitional classes.

At John Bowne High School, one teacher developed a detailed series of study guides which help students understand the assigned reading, practice simple essay responses to literature questions, and improve vocabulary and spelling. Students in this level 7 E.S.L. transitional class read three novels and a play, in addition to essays, myths, short stories, and poetry.

CLASSROOM IMPLEMENTATION

The evaluation team visited 16 funded E.S.L. transitional classes at five schools. These observations further illustrated the diversity among these classes. At Washington Irving High School, students in one class did five minutes of free writing and then read their work aloud. At Taft High School, students in the advanced/transitional class were identifying parts of speech. At John Bowne High School, students in the advanced transitional class who were preparing for the Regents Examination in English discussed a literature assignment.

Some of these E.S.L. transitional classes were largely indistinguishable from mainstream English classes. In others, however, teachers concentrated more on oral communication or analyzed a difficult passage which might not have presented comprehension problems to the native speaker of English. At Taft High School, the educational assistant (E.A.) provided occasional translation into Spanish. At Washington Irving High School, the only other school visited which had E.A.s in the E.S.L. transitional classes, the E.A. worked with individual students. S.D.S.s reported that teachers at several schools, particularly those with well-established E.S.L. programs, addressed language issues in class to a considerable extent. These reports concurred with the observations of the evaluation team.

Regardless of the particular classroom focus or approach, teachers and S.D.S.s agreed that students' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills benefited from an additional daily

period of English-language instruction. Their most frequently-repeated recommendation was that students take even more English, whether through longer E.S.L. transitional class periods or, in a few schools, through assignment to a paired tax-levy English class.

Teachers of funded E.S.L. transitional classes reported discussing with teachers of paired classes individual student's problems and progress. They consulted about curriculum and about students with particular problems. They did this almost entirely on an informal basis; teachers at only one of the schools visited indicated that they met with teachers of paired classes during departmental meetings.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Funded E.S.L. transitional classes were remarkably diverse in terms of teacher background, student placement and programming, and classroom focus. In part, this diversity reflects the decentralization of all Chapter I/P.S.E.N. programs in which specific programming decisions are located within each school. In relation to the E.S.L. transitional classes, it also reflects the role of classes which, because of their transitional nature are neither an integral part of the required E.S.L. curriculum nor a mainstream English class. Although specific programming decisions are made by the schools, the E.S.L. central program office plays a valuable role in providing all funded teachers with materials, working with those who need additional training in E.S.L. methodology, and initiating and supporting the further development of E.S.L. transitional classes.

Decisions about student placement varied from school to school. In more than half of the schools with E.S.L. transitional classes, students took funded transitional classes corresponding to E.S.L. 5 or 6. At the remaining schools, they took funded classes corresponding to E.S.L. 7 or 7/8.

The relatively small number of funded E.S.L. transitional classes made it difficult for some schools to program students for a paired tax-levy English class. In a few schools, E.S.L. transitional students were either scattered among different English classes or did not take a paired class in conjunction with their funded one. As a result, they lost two important

potential benefits: a double-period each of day of English-language instruction; and participation in a paired class whose curriculum was coordinated with that in their funded class.

In some schools, considerable overlap existed between the skills taught in the funded and the paired classes. In others, the funded and the paired classes each had a discrete focus. From school to school, however, the focus varied. So, for example, in one school the transitional class covered writing, whereas in another school the tax-levy class was specifically a writing class. At one school, an English teacher had developed a writing manual for the tax-levy classes which she subsequently used when she taught a funded transitional class.

The assignment of teachers from different departments to the funded and paired classes hampered articulation between them. Informal meetings were certainly valuable. However, they were likely to be sporadic at best and even less likely to occur during those times when beginning-of-term programming and uniform test administration were teachers' priorities. The lack of regularity in such meetings meant that teachers of funded and paired classes did not necessarily share in a timely way information about their students which might have helped teachers more effectively identify and address student problems. It also prevented information about curriculum material from being shared in an ongoing manner.

Based on the evaluation findings, it is recommended that:

- Wherever possible, E.S.L. transitional students should be programmed to take a paired tax-levy English class.

- The E.S.L Program should encourage greater articulation between teachers of funded E.S.L. transitional classes and teachers of paired tax-levy classes.

- Program administrators and O.E.A. should work together to identify high schools with exemplary practices and share their findings with high schools throughout the city.